

REQUEST FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

ACTIVITY DATA

Activity Name:	Electoral and Political Processes in Syria
Geographic Location(s) (Country/Region):	Syria START
Amendment (Yes/No), if Yes indicate # (1, 2...):	No
Implementation Start/End Dates (FY or M/D/Y):	06/01/2021 - 05/31/2025
If Amended, specify New End Date:	
Solicitation/Contract/Award Number(s):	
Implementing Partner(s):	Consortium for Elections & Political Processes Strengthening (CEPPS) partners
Award Type (specific acquisition or assistance mechanism(s) in place or anticipated):	Associate Award under the Global Elections & Political Transitions (GEPT) Leader with Associates
Bureau Tracking ID:	ME 21-32
Tracking ID of Related RCE/IEE (if any):	
Tracking ID of Other, Related Analyses:	

ORGANIZATIONAL/ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Implementing Operating Unit(s): (e.g. Mission or Bureau or Office)	USAID/Syria START
Lead BEO Bureau:	Middle East
Funding Operating Unit(s):	Syria
Funding Account(s) (if available):	
Original Funding Amount:	\$12,000,000
If Amended, specify funding amount:	
If Amended, specify new funding total:	
Prepared by:	C. Frey
Date Prepared:	03/17/2021

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW DATA

Analysis Type:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request for Categorical Exclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Deferral
Environmental Determination(s):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Categorical Exclusion(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Deferred (per 22 CFR 216.3(a)(7)(iv))
RCE Expiration Date (if applicable):	End of Associate Award performance period
Additional Analyses/Reporting Required:	
Climate Risks Identified (#):	Low <u>3</u> Moderate <u> </u> High <u> </u>
Climate Risks Addressed (#):	Low <u>n/a</u> Moderate <u> </u> High <u> </u>

THRESHOLD DETERMINATION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Through the Global Elections & Political Transitions (GEPT) mechanism USAID/Syria will support efforts by the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the Self Administration of Northeast Syria (SANES), other relevant local government actors, and Syrian civil society to enhance efficient, inclusive, and accountable governance in Northeast Syria (NES). The program will also support U.S. Government (USG) foreign policy goals in Syria by advancing implementation of the political process outlined in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254 and enhance the participation of Syrian citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATIONS

Upon approval of this document, the determinations become affirmed, per Agency regulations (22 CFR 216).

TABLE 1: ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATIONS

Activities	Categorical Exclusion Citation (if applicable)	Deferral ¹
Objective 1: Support progress towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria while ensuring processes are inclusive of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized groups.		
Result 1.1: Political processes advanced with inclusion of women, youth, ethnic, religious, and other marginalized groups	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Result 1.2: New governance mechanisms developed for Syria encourage democratic practices, including transparency and accountability	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: Promote stability within communities recently liberated from ISIS by improving inclusive citizen-state relationships at the local level, including through local elections		
Result 2.1: Legal and regulatory framework for the administration of local elections in non-regime held areas is developed	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Result 2.2: Local government institutions' capacity to implement transparent and credible electoral and political processes is strengthened	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Result 2.3: Local government structures supported to develop innovative social accountability tools and effectively consult and engage with constituents	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: Enhance the participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes		
Result 3.1: Grassroots and civil society organizations' capacity to increase citizen engagement with local governance bodies is	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹ Deferrals must be cleared through an Amendment to this RCE prior to implementation of any deferred activities.

bolstered		
Results 3.2: Citizen watchdog and monitoring groups' capacity is developed to transparently and effectively observe local political and electoral processes and communicate findings to local government officials and citizens	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Result 3.3: An informed citizenry, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities and other marginalized groups, is able to demand more accountable and responsive policy-making and participate meaningfully in local electoral and political processes	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)	<input type="checkbox"/>

CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT

The potential effect of climate risks/stressors on the sustainability of the project (changing precipitation patterns, rising temperature, floods, droughts, fires, landslides, etc.) were considered in addition to the impact of project activities on the climate (increased greenhouse gas emissions, land use changes, etc.). Considering these factors and the relatively short (3 year) duration and impact period for this activity, the climate risk was determined to be **LOW** for all sub-activities. Annex 1 summarizes the findings of the CRM Screening (see Annex 1).

IMPLEMENTATION

In accordance with 22 CFR 216 and Agency policy, the conditions and requirements of this document become mandatory upon approval. This includes the relevant limitations, conditions and requirements in this document as stated in Section 3 of this RCE and any BEO Specified Conditions of Approval.


USAID will ensure that the following requirements are met:

- Ensure compliance with applicable partner country requirements
- Annual review of project activities to ensure that scope is still covered by Categorical Exclusion
- **The Implementing Partner must ensure compliance with all host government and USAID requirements for disease prevention and ensure its staff and volunteers receive appropriate and timely guidance and training on the latest mitigation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. This includes, but is not limited to proper hygiene, use of masks and gloves, cleaning/disinfecting, and social distancing, as appropriate.**

USAID APPROVAL OF REQUEST FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

ACTIVITY NAME: Electoral and Political Processes in Syria

Bureau Tracking ID: ME 21-32

Approval:	Dianna Darsney, START Deputy Director Mission Director or Equivalent	04/06/21 Date
Clearance:	N/A Activity Manager [<i>as appropriate</i>]	Date
Clearance:	Joshua Smith [NAME], A/COR	03/31/2021 Date
Clearance:	Christopher Frey – by email (as action MEO) Mission Environmental Officer	19-Mar-21 Date
Clearance:	Christopher Frey – by email Regional Environmental Advisor	19-Mar-21 Date
Clearance:	Rene Dupuy Regional Legal Officer	04/19/2021 Date
Concurrence:	 Jeffrey Ploetz, Middle East Bureau Environmental Officer	4/19/2021 Date

DISTRIBUTION:

A/COR Files
MEO, REA, and BEO Files
Environmental Compliance Database (ECD)

1.0 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE RCE

The purpose of this document is to establish that all proposed projects/activities belong to classes of actions eligible for Categorical Exclusions as set out in Agency regulations (22 CFR 216.2(c)) and that there are no foreseeable significant direct or indirect impacts that would preclude them from receiving a Categorical Exclusion. Upon approval of this document, the Categorical Exclusions are affirmed for the Activity. This analysis also documents the results of the Activity level Climate Risk Management process in accordance with USAID policy (specifically, ADS 201 mandatory reference 201mal).

This RCE is a critical element of USAID's mandatory environmental review and compliance process meant to achieve environmentally sound activity design and implementation.

1.2 ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Through the Global Elections & Political Transitions (GEPT) mechanism USAID/Syria will support efforts by the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the Self Administration of Northeast Syria (SANES), other relevant local government actors, and Syrian civil society to enhance efficient, inclusive, and accountable governance in Northeast Syria (NES). The program will also support U.S. Government (USG) foreign policy goals in Syria by advancing implementation of the political process outlined in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254 and enhance the participation of Syrian citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes.

1.3 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Problem Statement:

The decade-long Syrian conflict has left a devastating toll on Syrians as a result of civil war, endemic violence, mass atrocities and the ethnic cleansing of multiple marginalized groups. It has also exacerbated historic tribal, ethnic, and religious divisions. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254 provides a roadmap for peace through political transition and calls on parties to "protect the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination," highlighting the need to protect the rights of minorities and marginalized groups in the political resolution of the conflict. Supporting the political process set out in UNSCR 2254 is one of the U.S. government's main objectives in Syria. However, the constitutional committee process set out in UNSCR 2254 has stalled, with parties failing to make any progress after five meetings and months of discussions. Despite these setbacks, the U.S. Government and the international community remain committed to a negotiated political solution as the only viable path to solve the Syrian conflict.

The war has impacted local governance structures in an environment of already limited citizen participation prior to the war and growing divisions between tribal, ethnic, and religious groups. In northeast Syria, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and Self-Administration of Northeast Syria (SANES) governance structures and institutions are nascent, not largely representative of or

accountable to the broader population in NES, and are struggling to meet the needs of citizens in areas formerly controlled by ISIS.

Theory of Change:

It is critical to support a political solution to the conflict in Syria, strengthen citizen-state relationships in areas recently liberated from ISIS to prevent return of extremist ideologies, and build citizen engagement in democratic processes. Therefore, this program's theory of change is as follows: If Syrian grassroots organizations and local government capacity to plan for and implement inclusive election processes is strengthened and if meaningful engagement between Syrian citizens, civil society and local and national authorities is bolstered, then citizen-state relationships will be improved. If Syrian stakeholders are able to build their expertise to influence the constitutional framework, especially as it relates to democratic election standards, then the pre-conditions for democratic and inclusive national electoral processes will be improved.

TABLE 2: DEFINED OR ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES AND SUB-ACTIVITIES

Objective 1 — Support progress towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria while ensuring processes are inclusive of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized groups
Result 1.1 - Political processes advanced with inclusion of women, youth, ethnic, religious, and other marginalized groups
1.2 - New governance mechanisms developed for Syria encourage democratic practices, including transparency and accountability
Objective 2 — Promote stability within communities recently liberated from ISIS by improving inclusive citizen-state relationships at the local level, including through local elections
Result 2.1 - Legal and regulatory framework for the administration of local elections in non-regime held areas is developed
2.2 - Local government institutions' capacity to implement transparent and credible electoral and political processes is strengthened
2.3 - Local government structures supported to develop innovative social accountability tools and effectively consult and engage with constituents
Objective 3 — Enhance the participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes
Result 3.1 - Grassroots and civil society organizations' capacity to increase citizen engagement with local governance bodies is bolstered
3.2 - Citizen watchdog and monitoring groups' capacity is developed to transparently and effectively observe local political and electoral processes and communicate findings to local government officials and citizens
3.3 - An informed citizenry, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities and other marginalized groups, is able to demand more accountable and responsive policy-making and participate meaningfully in local electoral and political processes

2.0 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

2.1 JUSTIFICATION FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

The activities under the Electoral and Political Processes in Syria are among the classes of actions listed in 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2) and have no foreseeable significant direct or indirect

adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, under 22 CFR 216.2(c)(1), neither an IEE nor an EA will be required for these activities. Instead, a Categorical Exclusion is recommended for the projects/activities described above in Section 1.3 as follows:

TABLE 3: RECOMMENDED DETERMINATION FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Activity and Sub-Activity #	Recommended Determination for Categorical Exclusion
Objective 1: Support progress towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria while ensuring processes are inclusive of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized groups.	
Result 1.1: Political processes advanced with inclusion of women, youth, ethnic, religious, and other marginalized groups	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Result 1.2: New governance mechanisms developed for Syria encourage democratic practices, including transparency and accountability	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Objective 2: Promote stability within communities recently liberated from ISIS by improving inclusive citizen-state relationships at the local level, including through local elections	
Result 2.1: Legal and regulatory framework for the administration of local elections in non-regime held areas is developed	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Result 2.2: Local government institutions' capacity to implement transparent and credible electoral and political processes is strengthened	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Result 2.3: Local government structures supported to develop innovative social accountability tools and effectively consult and engage with constituents	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Objective 3: Enhance the participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes	
Result 3.1: Grassroots and civil society organizations' capacity to increase citizen engagement with local governance bodies is bolstered	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Results 3.2: Citizen watchdog and monitoring groups' capacity is developed to transparently and effectively observe local political and electoral processes and communicate findings to local government officials and citizens	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)
Result 3.3: An informed citizenry, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities and other marginalized groups, is able to demand more accountable and responsive policy-making and participate meaningfully in local electoral and political processes	§216.2(c)(2)(i), (iii), and (v)

2.2 CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT

The potential effect of climate risks/stressors on the sustainability of the project (changing precipitation patterns, rising temperature, floods, droughts, fires, landslides, etc.) were considered in addition to the impact of project activities on the climate (increased greenhouse gas emissions, land use changes, etc.). Considering these factors and the relatively short (3 year) duration and impact period for this activity, the climate risk was determined to be **LOW** for all sub-activities. Annex 1 summarizes the findings of the CRM Screening (see Annex 1).

3.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

The categorical exclusions recommended in this document apply only to projects/activities and sub-activities described herein.

Other projects/activities that may arise must be subject to an environmental analysis and the appropriate documentation prepared and approved, whether it be a new Request for Categorical Exclusion, an amendment, or other type of 22 CFR 216 document.

It is confirmed that the projects/activities described herein do not involve actions normally having a significant effect on the environment, including those described in 22 CFR 216.2(d).

3.1 MANDATORY INCLUSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS IN SOLICITATIONS, AWARDS, BUDGETS, AND WORK PLANS

USAID will ensure the environmental compliance requirements are incorporated into solicitations, awards, budgets, and work plans, including relevant limitations of Section 3 above. In addition, climate risk management requirements will also be incorporated.

3.2 GENERAL IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

USAID will ensure that the following requirements are met:

- Ensure compliance with applicable partner country requirements
- Annual review of project activities to ensure that scope is still covered by Categorical Exclusion
- **The Implementing Partner must ensure compliance with all host government and USAID requirements for disease prevention and ensure its staff and volunteers receive appropriate and timely guidance and training on the latest mitigation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. This includes, but is not limited to proper hygiene, use of masks and gloves, cleaning/disinfecting, and social distancing, as appropriate.**

ATTACHMENTS:

Annex 1: Climate Risk Management Summary Table for Activity

ANNEX 1. **ACTIVITY** CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT SUMMARY TABLE

Tasks/Defined or Illustrative Interventions	Climate Risks ²	Risk Rating ³	How Risks are Addressed ⁴	Opportunities to Strengthen Climate Resilience ⁵
Objective 1 — Support progress towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria while ensuring processes are inclusive of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized groups.	Delays or disruptions in conducting activities due to extreme weather events.	LOW	n/a	n/a
Objective 2: Promote stability within communities recently liberated from ISIS by improving inclusive citizen-state relationships at the local level, including through local elections.	Delays or disruptions in conducting activities due to extreme weather events.	LOW	n/a	n/a
Objective 3: Enhance the participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in electoral, political, and transitional processes.	Delays or disruptions in conducting activities due to extreme weather events.	LOW	n/a	n/a

² List key risks related to the defined/illustrative interventions identified in the screening and additional assessment.

³ Low/Moderate/ High

⁴ Describe how risks have been addressed in activity design and/or additional steps that will be taken in implementation. If you chose to accept the risk, briefly explain why.

⁵ Describe opportunities to achieve multiple development objectives by integrating climate resilience or mitigation measures